

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
FOR
Bunkerville-Mesquite Hazardous Fuels Reduction
Project JE25**

I have reviewed Environmental Assessment (EA) NV-052-03-0239, dated August 15, 2003. After consideration of the environmental effects as described in the EA, and incorporated herein, I have determined that the proposed action with the project design specifications (minimization measures) identified in the EA will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required to be prepared.

I have determined the proposed action is in conformance with the approved Las Vegas Resource Management Plan and is consistent with the plans and policies of neighboring local, county, state, tribal and federal agencies and governments. This finding and conclusion is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the context and the intensity of impacts described in the EA.

Context: The project area is located along the Virgin River in southern Nevada and comprises a 10-mile corridor of wildland urban interface (WUI) between the communities of Bunkerville and Mesquite, Nevada. This WUI area is characterized by rapid urban growth and development. The WUI corridor is in Fire Condition Class III vegetative condition with heavy fuel loads comprised of dense stands of tamarisk. Fire history in this area is characterized by short return interval, high intensity fires. Potential for loss or harm of human life and destruction of property is considered high.

Intensity:

1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The environmental assessment has considered both beneficial and adverse impacts of the hazardous fuels reduction project. On the whole, the project will result in improved vegetative condition and fire resiliency for the WUI area under consideration. Ancillary effects in the manner of overall habitat improvement, increased biodiversity of native plants and animals, improved water quality and a return to a more ecologically functional riverine system are expected over time. A return to favorable ecological conditions is considered as merely improving the quality of the human environment through proactive and preventative fire management, and is not considered a significant effect both in the short or long term.

2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

The proposed action will result in improved public health and safety by reducing the risk of uncontrolled wildland fires in an urban interface setting. Implementation components of the proposed action will not result in potentially substantial or adverse impacts to public health and safety. The mechanical treatments will be conducted according to BLM safety standards. Workplace hazard risks assessments will be completed by the

workforce supervisor prior to on-the-ground activities. Chemical herbicide treatments will be used in post-mechanical treatment follow-up work. All registered herbicide labels will be followed and adhered to as required by the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) and Pesticide Use Proposals will be completed and approved per the BLM Manual 9015, prior to any chemical herbicide applications. Human health hazard risk assessments have been completed for the herbicide Garlon and worker and public safety conclusions are presented in the 13-state Vegetation Treatments EIS (1991), to which this EA is tiered. It has been determined that proper application of the chemical herbicide Garlon and its variants, in the course of BLM vegetation management activities, present no unusual or significant risk to workers or public health or safety.

3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

The project area is representative of the Virgin River corridor in vegetative condition and ecological functionality. The most unique characteristic of the project area is its Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) character, which has evolved in the last decade due to rapid urban growth. The project area does not contain any historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, or wetlands. The Virgin River is not designated as a Wild and Scenic River. An approximately 2.5-mile long segment of the project area is within the Virgin River Area of Critical Environmental Concern. As documented throughout the EA and in this FONSI, the proposed JE25 treatment is restorative in character and hence will have a net beneficial effect on the quality of the Virgin River ACEC.

4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The effects of hazardous fuels reduction are well known and documented and are not highly controversial in that reduced fuels equate to reduced fire severity and better manageability. The effects from implementing the mechanical treatments proposed with chemical follow-up on re-growth and re-sprout are also well known and documented and not considered to be highly controversial. Overall, the methods of vegetation treatment activities, including fuels reduction, are scientifically accepted methods to employ to meet resource or management objectives and are not considered highly controversial.

5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

There are no known effects of the proposed action identified in the EA which are considered uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. All fuels treatment methods proposed to be employed are accepted standard practices.

6) The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The proposed action does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects and does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. All future hazardous fuels reduction projects, if they occur would be subject to the same environmental assessment standards and independent decision making.

7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*

No significant cumulative impacts have been identified in the EA. Other fuels reduction and vegetation treatment projects (both private and public) may be proposed along the Virgin River corridor in the future and post-fire rehabilitation projects are ongoing and will also likely occur in the future, based on fire history and response. These projects seen together with other land disturbing activities on-going in the area would not result in cumulatively significant impacts at the local or watershed scale.

8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the NRHP or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

No districts, sites, highways, structures or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) were identified in the project area and EA. The proposed action will not cause the loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.

9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the ESA of 1973.*

The desert tortoise, Yuma clapper rail, yellow-billed cuckoo, southwestern willow flycatcher and endemic Virgin River chub and woundfin are all present within the project area. The EA has identified that no significant or adverse impacts would result to these species from implementing the proposed action. The proposed action has undergone consultation and coordination with the USFWS and has been determined the activities will not likely adversely affect any of these species or their critical habitat.

10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

The proposed action will not violate or threaten to violate any Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.



John C. Jamrog, Assistant Field Manager,
Recreation and Renewable Resources

08/26/03
Date

Attachments:

Tamarisk Treatment Project JE25 EA